PS 3503
.A732
W6
1914
Copy 1

# THE WOMAN WHO CAME AT NIGHT

*By* A MINISTER

Class PS3503
Book .A733 W6
Copyright No. 1914

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

# THE WOMAN WHO CAME AT NIGHT

She Borrowed Money of the Minister for School Books, and of His Wife for Lingerie [Page 49]

# THE WOMAN WHO CAME AT NIGHT

## BEING THE EXPERIENCES OF A MINISTER

Bruce Barton

THE PILGRIM PRESS
BOSTON NEW YORK CHICAGO

PS 3503
.A732W6
1914

COPYRIGHT, 1914
BY LUTHER H. CARY

THE · PLIMPTON · PRESS
NORWOOD · MASS · U · S · A

$1.00
OCT 30 1914
©Cl. A388159
No 1

TO

E. R. B.

*ACKNOWLEDGMENT*

*The Publishers and Author desire to acknowledge the courtesy of Miss Gertrude Lane, Editor of the Woman's Home Companion, in allowing these stories to be reprinted from that publication.*

# CONTENTS


| | PAGE |
|---|---|
| The Woman Who Came at Night | 1 |
| The Lingerie Lady | 31 |
| The Voice of the Lord | 59 |
| The Woman Divided | 87 |
| The Shadow on the Screen | 121 |

# ILLUSTRATIONS

She borrowed money of the minister for school books, and of his wife for lingerie . . . . . *Frontispiece*

She had come to me at night, hardly knowing why she came . *Facing page* 16

She came to sob out her perplexity in my study . . . . . 88

# I

# THE WOMAN WHO CAME AT NIGHT

# THE WOMAN WHO CAME AT NIGHT

THE FIRST IN THE SERIES OF A MINISTER'S EXPERIENCES

I SUPPOSE I have known twenty-five thousand women in my nearly thirty years of ministry. There have been all kinds of women, as there have been all kinds of men; but as I look back over the years, the women show up rather more favorably than the men. In the long procession of those who have touched my life — sometimes for a mere moment, sometimes during the happy years of a long pastorate — the number who have been a disappointment, who have proved unworthy of confidence or unresponsive to service rendered in their behalf, has been so small as to be practically

negligible. I should like to emphasize this at the very outset.

So long as the world is as it is, he who enters upon the work of the ministry must expect that more than a half of his time and effort will be claimed by women — at least if he serves in parishes where ordinary conditions prevail. In that respect the minister is not different from the musician or the actor, the lecturer or the popular author. The proportion of women in church congregations is not so overwhelming by any means as the proportion of women at concerts, at plays or among the readers of new books. Women have leisure for these finer things of life, as their harried and driven husbands do not; and in their church attendance there is another influence more potent even than their leisure. Spiritual insight of the truer sort is the peculiar birthright of good women; they are the preservers of reverence; the trans-

mitters of vision to the muscled men who are their sons. If the Lord when he cometh shall find faith in the world, it will be due in no small measure to the apostolic succession of good women, who have administered its sacred rites from generation to generation at the altar of their homes.

No minister of the gospel could have a more varied or more interesting experience with women than the Master himself. Of the little group of followers whose names have come down to us linked with his — those who knew him best and in whose company he was most frequently — nearly half are women, and women of all classes and descriptions. There were the two kindly maiden ladies, Mary and Martha, who were active in all good causes, "troubled with many things," in whose house and with whose brother Lazarus he so often found congenial company. There were rich women, like the wife of the steward

of Herod, drawn by the wonder of his new doctrine, who followed him on his journeys and contributed liberally to his work. There were sick women who found in the splendour of his health and the wonderful tonic of his joy in living a new impulse to live and to grow well. And there were women of the streets, one of whom, at least, caught up in the very moment of her sin and cast at his feet for censure, looked up to see the first glance of gentlemanly consideration that had ever shone for her in the eyes of any man, and was re-created from that instant. If the Saviour of the world found so much of his inspiration in the companionship of good women, builded so much of his hope for the regeneration of mankind upon them, we who are seeking to better our own little portion of the world after the pattern he set down are not likely to progress very far by departing from his example.

So I say at the outset that among the twenty-five thousand women whom I have known in my active ministry twenty-four thousand and some hundreds have been good women. And among these I now feel sure — though for years I lived in uncertainty about it — that I can class The Woman Who Came at Night.

The parsonage had been built in the days when the city was smaller, and land values low. It stood far back from the street, almost completely hidden by a hedge that ran along the side walk and by the two splendid oaks that had been planted by my earliest predecessor, the first pastor of the church, seventy-five years before. On Saturday nights as I would sit before the open fireplace in the study working on my Sunday morning sermons I seemed to be lifted clear out of the environment of the week, so completely were the disturbing sights

and sounds of the outside screened from me. It was generally known among the congregation that Saturday evenings were devoted to my sermons; therefore I was almost never interrupted. And on this particular evening the knock at the study door was doubly surprising, for a heavy rain had been falling since noon.

A preacher is only a made-over layman; there is no magic in his ordination that extracts the temptation to selfishness entirely from him. I have been tempted more than once to let the telephone ring unanswered, or to pretend that I had retired when there came a knock on the door, knowing that no shred of light could creep through the study windows to betray me. And the temptation was never stronger than on that rainy Saturday night. The study was very comfortable and I had reached an absorbing point in my writing. I waited until the knock was repeated, and

then, because there seemed something strangely anxious and appealing in it, I walked over to the door and threw it open.

Almost before I knew it a woman's form had flashed by me into the light, and a voice half spoke, half whispered in my ear:

"Oh, please close it quickly!"

The voice belonged unmistakably to a woman of culture and one accustomed apparently to command. I shut the door and turned toward her.

"You wished to see me?" I said.

"Yes," she answered and dropped into the chair before the fire.

She was of medium height and must have been, I judged, between twenty-five and thirty. She wore a plain black coat that covered her almost completely, and a veil, through which, as she turned toward the light, I could see brown eyes and features that were singularly attractive. She was unmistakably ner-

vous, and tapped upon the arm of the chair while she talked.

"May I keep my veil on, Doctor?" she began.

"As you please," I answered.

"You see I am a little excited," she laughed shortly. "I don't usually make calls at this time of night. I was a little abrupt at the door, I fear; I hope you will forgive me. You see," she hesitated, "you see, I thought perhaps I might have been followed."

"I don't remember whether I have had the pleasure —"

"No," she answered quickly. "But I have heard you preach, and your son Charles is in my class at school, the Lincoln School —"

"Surely," I responded, trying hard to remember the names of the teachers who had my various boys in charge. "I have heard him speak of you often, Miss —" She came to my rescue.

"Miss Daniels. I live near here; and

you're the only minister in the city whom I know. At least I felt that I knew you — well enough to —"

"To talk to me like a father — or a mother," I said.

"Thank you so much," she responded; and there was a little catch in her voice. "My mother died a long time ago, and my father couldn't understand, even if he wanted to. You see I'm going to run away; at least I think —"

"Suppose you start at the beginning," I suggested, "and tell me just what happened."

She seemed relieved by the suggestion. "Oh, I'm sure I can trust you," she said. "I'm going away to be married — to New York. Mr. Howard, the man,— there are reasons why he can't marry me in this state. He has asked me to meet him in New York a week from next Thursday." She stopped, a little terrified by what she had said. "Doesn't that shock you?"

"Not necessarily. But you will have to begin further back — that is if you really want me to help you. How long have you been in the city?"

"Two years," she answered "I came here from the normal school two years ago. Sometimes it seems ten: if you've ever lived alone in a boarding-house where you fairly hated all the other boarders you know what I mean."

I nodded, and she went on, apparently encouraged.

"I was born out in Illinois. My father owns a farm out there, and is fairly well to do, as farmers go. But I hated farm life: it is too depressingly dull. The sameness of it, the awful certainty that one day is going to be exactly like the others, that nothing will ever happen, world without end — I hated that from my earliest girlhood, or at least from the time I began to read and to know something about the world outside. My father thought

me unreasonable, and perhaps he was right, from his point of view. He gave me everything that he could — on a farm. Once or twice a year I went to the city to buy clothes, or something that he couldn't find in the mail-order catalogs. He couldn't understand what more a girl should want than that, and I long ago gave up trying to make it clear to him. For ten years after my mother died I kept house for him; and then — I don't know whether to call it a misfortune or an act of Providence— he married a woman with whom I could never in the world have the least bond of sympathy; and I persuaded him that the only possible solution was to let me go away to school. I was twenty-two when I went, four or five years older than I ought to have been; but I had the ideas and thoughts of a girl of sixteen. And compared to a good many girls of the city I was younger than sixteen."

"You were still looking for a fairy prince," I said.

She laughed a clear appealing sort of a laugh which seemed to brush away the evident restraint under which she had been speaking.

"That almost describes it. The normal school opened up a new world to me. For the first time in my life I found real companionship and a chance to read and to hear music and to be irresponsible. It was like heaven. Then I came here two years ago to teach and —"

"And what?"

"It's almost worse than the farm," she said resentfully. "It's lonesome; I haven't any friends. Have you ever been really alone in a city? The country is friendly at least. It wraps you up at night in a kindly quietness, and wakes you in the morning with a soft sunbeam. But the city — it just shouts in your ears. I'm tired of the shouting

and lonesomeness." She stopped a moment, and then added suddenly, "Mr. Howard is a theatrical man."

"You met him when he was playing here?"

"Yes."

I waited a moment for her to continue and as she did not speak, I took up the story for her.

"He was stopping at your boarding-house," I said, "or possibly he picked up your bag when you dropped it in the street, or brushed against you in a car. He was very courteous and attentive and you let him call. He told you about the interesting life of the theatre, and how happy it could be if there were two to share it. But he confessed that he was lonesome, that the travel was monotony when one had to do it alone, that he dreamed of a little cottage that would be a real home. Then you told him all about your loneliness, and he told you that he loved you.

He confessed that he had been married before — and so you promised to meet him in New York a week from Thursday morning."

She let me finish without interruption, but at the last word her face dropped suddenly into her hands and her shoulders shook, though she made no sound. After a bit I stepped over to her and laid my hand on her shoulder.

"Now tell me," I said, "about the other man."

"Oh how did you know?" she sobbed and then fitfully, little by little, she finished the story.

There had been another man or rather, there *was*. He was the only son of a neighboring farmer back in Illinois, and all through her girlhood his devotion had never faltered. He was big and muscular and had red hair (Howard's hair was black and curly) and she thought, as a girl, that he had no soul. She liked him in a way — admired him

She had Come to Me at Night, Hardly Knowing Why She Came

even — but the thought of living forever on his farm or any other farm was too much. There had been a tearful interview on the day she left for the normal school, and she had not seen him since.

But every Tuesday morning she received a letter from him, written in his big, unformed hand, and carried to the post office Sunday night in order that she might have it always at the same hour. He never had admitted to himself nor to her that there was any doubt of the final outcome. He knew she would come back to him. And mingled with the homely gossip of the farm, the birth of calves, the harvesting of crops, and the simple annals of the neighborhood, there were brief references to the books he was reading, and his progress in a correspondence course. He was going to be worthy of her when she came back —

So she had come to me at night,

hardly knowing why she came, but driven by the necessity for telling her story to somebody. Probably, she said, I would think her foolish to have come when she had already made up her mind. For of course she *had* made up her mind: she was going away a week from Thursday; she was determined to snatch for herself at last the romance and thrill, and all that her little starved life had wanted so long. She *just wouldn't* go back to a farm —

When she had finished I waited. The clock in the dining room struck twelve, a long, slow, solemn stroke, as though time had grown weary in its incessant task of measuring human frailty and woe. I waited until the last peal had sounded, and then I started in to tell her, as gently and earnestly as I could, some things — many things — that her mother would have told her, had she lived.

I told her that life is a long road and

youth merely the first sunshiny approach to it. There are rough places in the road, I told her, and marshes and dry, parched, desert spots. Many people fall away on the road, I said, and are lost; or, more hopeless still, are broken, and drag themselves thereafter wearily to the end. But others live through the long way triumphantly. And these last are they who have the pearl of great price — faith in God and health and — if they be women — the love of righteous men.

Youth passes quickly, I told her, and with it all desire and restlessness that is not love; but love remains a strong, vibrant, never-faltering companion on the long way. I told her some things which that love would and would not do. One thing it could never do, I said, if it was real and deep and lasting — it could never make such a demand upon her as Howard had made.

She took it all very nobly, looking

straight into my face, and thrusting her handkerchief up now and then underneath her veil to catch a big tear that furrowed slowly down her cheek. When I had finished she thanked me and promised that she would write Howard that she could not come.

"But I'll never go back to the farm," she said.

"I shall pray to God for you tonight," I answered; and at her request I closed the door quickly behind her, for she insisted that she must be allowed to find her way home alone.

It was nearly one o'clock. The sermon lay unfinished on my desk. I was very tired, for one cannot give himself to the problems and cares of another without paying the price afterwards in weariness of soul. That is the thing — and not the preaching — that wears ministers out. Yet late as it was I sat down and wrote a letter to the big, redheaded giant on the Il-

linois farm, in which I told him also many things.

She was not at church next morning as I had thought she might be, nor at the evening service either. It was not until Wednesday evening that I saw her. She slipped in late at the prayer meeting, and lingering after the congregation had left, asked me if she might speak to me for a minute. I led her into the church study. She was evidently tired almost to the point of exhaustion; there were dark rings under her eyes. She did not sit down, but spoke abruptly, almost before I had closed the door.

"There is his answer!" she said, and thrust into my hand first a telegram and then a letter. The telegram read:

"*Will arrive Thursday night — be ready. Am writing. Love.* EDWIN HOWARD."

The letter was long and full of the melodramatic language of the stage.

It was written on the stationery of a New York theatrical club. God had intended them for each other, it said; nothing should ever change his determination nor keep them apart. He could do anything, would do anything, for her; but without her his life would be an empty sham. She must come with him — he would have no other answer. He would be at a certain spot in the park on Thursday night, with a carriage; she must meet him there. And it ended with a picture of the journeys they would take into places where she had never been, and of the little vine-covered cottage to which they would at last turn home. It was fervid, intense — too intense I thought. It sounded fair: but I did not like it.

I started to speak but she interrupted.

"It's no use, Doctor; I have made my decision. I came to thank you for your kindness and to show you that you are wrong. He's coming for me,

you see, and — I am going. You have been very kind. I — Good night." Her hand touched mine for just a moment, and she was gone.

It seemed a tragic thing to me — one of those heart-breaking experiences in a minister's life in which, having done the very most that he can, he must stand by passively to see his own defeat. I telegraphed the big, red-haired young man in Illinois that night, and wrote him. It was all I could do. This was my letter, as I remember it.

"Dear David, — *I call you 'David,' for though I have never met you I know you very well. I have lived with you in spirit most of the time since I wrote you last. I have thought of you in the daytime and prayed for you every night — and for her. She has made her decision. She is going away with him next Thursday-week night. He is to meet her with a carriage in the park at the monument at*

*nine o'clock and they are to take the ten o'clock train for New York.*

*"I say that I know you very well. I think I do. You are big-framed, big-muscled, big-hearted, and I believe you are true-hearted as well. I believe you are worthy of the love of a good woman, and I am convinced, too, that she is good — and worthy of you. It is for that reason that I have cared so much and tried so hard. I have done all I can. I must leave the rest to you and to God. You must come here on Thursday. You must see her if you can. If you cannot, you must be at the monument with a carriage at nine o'clock on Thursday night. It is your only chance. Come as quickly as you can, We shall want you to be our guest while you are in town.*

*"May God bless you, my boy, and her."*

I mailed the letter that night and walked slowly home, planning how I might bring the two together when

David should arrive. And at home I found one of those unforseen but undeniable messages that break in so often upon the preacher's life and plans. A former parishioner had died in a far away city; the telegram was from his wife, asking me to come at once and conduct the funeral service in fulfillment of a promise I had made him long before. There was nothing to do but to go at once. My wife packed our bags and we left that night, not to return for ten days. And in those ten days David must have come, and Howard — and The Woman Who Came at Night gone away. I telegraphed her on Wednesday a message that should have reached her Thursday morning; urging her again to choose the love that had shown itself true and could be depended upon over the long road. She never answered the telegram. And when I returned to the city my inquiries at her boarding-house brought only the

information that she had gone away on the preceding Thursday and had left no forwarding address.

The procession of those who cast their burdens upon the preacher moves too rapidly to allow much time for retrospect. Yesterday's people and their problems have to give way before the new company clamoring for attention today; and as "yesterday" becomes "day before yesterday" and then "a week ago yesterday" and so on, those who came on that day, even though their problems touched us very closely, are inevitably pushed back into the recesses of memory, seldom to be called forth again. But I could not forget The Woman Who Came at Night. In the years that followed I thought of her very often.

What had happened on that Thursday night? Had David arrived in time or had he, perhaps, discouraged by her seeming faithlessness, decided not to

come at all? Had she gone with Howard and if so had he really meant to marry her, or had her name by this time been added to the long list of those who have loved not wisely but too well? The fact that I had heard nothing from her, that she had not answered my telegram nor written to thank me for my interest in her behalf, led me unwillingly to this conclusion. And yet I hated to give her up. There was in her so much of promise, her shortcomings had been so clearly due to lack of wisdom and experience, that I found myself still cherishing, in spite of my own judgment, the faith that somehow David had arrived in time and that right had won.

So for seven years The Woman Who Came at Night remained a mystery. Had David or Howard won her? Had there been two carriages that night at the monument and if so into which one had she stepped?

At the end of those seven years I was

supplying the pulpit one Sunday at a summer resort. After the service had been concluded a number of people stood waiting to speak to me, but they passed out one by one until all had gone except the gentleman who was to be my host at dinner. Walking toward the door with him I noticed for the first time that a woman stood alone in the church vestibule. She started toward us and as we met near the center of the church, I recognized her immediately as The Woman Who Came at Night. She had grown a little stouter, but there was the same youthful color in her cheeks, and a smile that had not been there seven years before.

"This is a great pleasure," I said to her.

"You must think us both very ungrateful," she answered, "not to have written or sent you word. I don't know how to explain it. Perhaps it was sensitiveness, perhaps pride. You

see I've tried to forget those two nights — the night at your house and the other. And I've pretty nearly succeeded," she added with a laugh.

It was a very musical, happy laugh.

"Your husband —" I said.

"He'll be so sorry not to have met you. He's more ashamed even than I am that we have not written. But he's a terribly laggard correspondent. And once he *did* write you but the letter came back."

I was consumed with curiosity, but I hardly knew how to phrase a question.

"Shall I meet him today?" I finally said.

"Oh, I wish you might, but he sent us on a couple of weeks ahead, and he won't get here until Friday. You see —" she laughed again — "it's our first real vacation in seven years and we're going to have a wonderful time of it. This is our boy."

As she spoke, a manly little chap,

apparently about five years old, who had been almost hidden between her and the pew, pushed forward and stretched up his chubby hand. I stopped to speak to him and it seemed to me I had never seen a finer, more promising lad of his years anywhere. I patted him on the head in the fatherly fashion that becomes instinctive with us preachers, and as I did so I noticed that he had red hair.

# II

# THE LINGERIE LADY

## THE LINGERIE LADY

THE SECOND OF THE EXPERIENCES

WHEN, unexpectedly, we received a call from our little mid-western church to one of the largest and best-known city churches in the denomination there ensued some very serious family discussion. My wife was the daughter of an Ohio pioneer who had cleared his own land and established a comfortable farm home; my father had spread healing forty miles in either direction as a country physician and was too busy ever to send a bill. Twelve hundred dollars a year was our salary in the little village church, and on it we lived comfortably, clothed our three children and were beginning to pay back something

on my college debts. Neither of us had spent any time in cities. It required some little faith and courage to believe that we could make a place for ourselves among people whose pastors had been nationally famous; that we could learn the ways of those that dwell in apartments instead of homes, and have no suppers. Among other things that gave us some concern was the matter of salary. Four thousand dollars, the amount offered, seemed to us wealth beyond all dreams. I could not help thinking of the books it would buy, and my wife — I am quite sure — had serious misgivings as to whether any minister of the gospel ought to be paid so much.

That was before we reached the city. In the first three months of our stay there it seemed to me as if every tramp and cripple, every man and woman, within a hundred miles that was halt or lame or blind called on us either at

the church office or the house. Whether it is a regular rule in beggardom to watch the paper for new arrivals whose sympathies may be played upon or whether I acquired in the first days a reputation for being easy which spread through the ranks of the unwashed, I cannot tell. But the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand was pretty nearly duplicated by us in those first twelve weeks. We fed everybody that came — and we still managed somehow to pay our bills.

Among the others who sought us out with ingenious tales of need I recall very clearly The Lingerie Lady. She was a woman whom one could not easily forget — not tall but more than usually attractive, with eyes that were big and round and wondering like the eyes of a child. No one could tell a lie who had eyes like that — so you would suppose at least — and yet I have seen that same big, wondering look in the eyes of

our youngest boy, and at the same time have observed unmistakable evidence of jam about the corners of his mouth.

I heard her even before I saw her. The church office consisted of two rooms: my assistant occupied the outer one, and a door in one corner opened into my private room. On this afternoon I was particularly busy, and she had apparently been speaking to him for some time before the sound of their voices attracted my attention. I rose and, without being seen looked out to see him in the very act of handing her a bill. She seemed to hesitate a moment; then she put it in her purse.

"I don't know how to thank you," she murmured, in a voice that was rich and deep and undeniably cultured. "You can hardly realize how much this will mean to me."

As she spoke she moved toward the door, my assistant following her. There she turned and with all the grace of

one to the manor born thanked him again and departed.

At that moment I stepped into the room. My assistant was perceptibly excited, nor did I blame him greatly. She was a very unusual woman — and he was very young.

"Did you see that lady?" he questioned. "One of the most remarkable cases — pathetic really. She's a college graduate."

"Yes," I said. "What did she want?"

"I felt awfully sorry for her," he continued. "She's a teacher of French and German. Five years ago she had some money left to her — enough, she thought, so that she could give up teaching. But she invested it in oil stock and last week she received word that the stock is worthless."

"I saw you give her the money." I interrupted.

He flushed a little. "I couldn't help it. She really is a teacher. I asked

her some questions in French and German and she answered them perfectly; her accent is really fine. She's a woman who isn't used to begging; you can see that. All she wanted was enough to buy one or two text-books: she has some pupils already, and she can start in with her teaching again right away. I gave her ten dollars. Don't you think that was right?"

I tried to look grave and judicial and reproving. "We must be very careful in such matters, Mr. Judson, I said to him. "I do not doubt that the woman is worthy, but it is very essential that we should make the most thorough investigation.

"I should have referred her to the Associated Charities pending my decision."

I disliked to administer anything that seemed like a rebuke to the young man, he was so very earnest and eager to do the right thing; but in this instance it

seemed to me necessary for his own good. "Had she come to me" I concluded, "I am quite certain I should not have given her any money."

And two days later, as luck would have it, she did come to me while my assistant was out making some calls. She drew back a little timidly when I opened the door in answer to her knock.

"Oh, excuse me!" she said. "I — I expected to find Mr. Judson."

"He is my assistant," I answered. "He will not be back this afternoon. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Mr. Judson has been very kind to me. I wanted to thank him."

"He told me about you," I said. "How is your teaching progressing?"

Her face became suddenly clouded. "It is hard," she said; "very hard. I am very much out of practice. You see, I thought I should never have to go back to teaching. Did Mr. Judson tell you —"

"He told me," I said hurriedly.

She was on the verge of tears; I knew the symptoms. I have gone through a great many hard experiences in my ministry, and have accustomed my nerves to withstand assaults of various kinds, but I have never learned to look upon a woman's tears unmoved.

And there were pressing reasons that afternoon for keeping my nerves under control. I had been appointed on a delegation to call upon the mayor, the spokesman had been taken suddenly ill and at the last moment I had been asked to make the speech. It was my first public appearance in the city and I wanted to speak well.

She looked quite pathetic sitting there at my desk, a lone woman, tossed aside by the rush and greed of the city, and there was no doubt that she was going to cry. My heart went out to her in spite of myself. She might be a fraud and a deceiver — I couldn't tell. But at

least she was a woman, and apparently distressed. I gave her the five dollars to purchase two lexicons which she said would enable her to refresh her vocabulary, and bade her Godspeed, supposing that I should never see her again.

She could not have been more than twenty-seven and there was a charm about her manner which was more than mere beauty. I remember thinking, as the door closed behind her, what a pity it was that so comely a woman should be left to struggle against the current of life alone.

But I was late already. The delegation was waiting for me when I arrived, and we hurried across to the mayor's office, where I made the speech, which the papers next morning said was a very good one.

There was to be a wedding at the church that night — for thus the drama of the minister's activities shifts suddenly from sorrow to rejoicing. I dined

with the delegation down town, hurried home to dress, and it was nearly midnight, after the ceremony and the reception at the bride's home, when I finally climbed out of the carriage at my own door.

My wife met me in the hall-way.

"Miss Lambert was here," she said.

"Lambert," I repeated; "Lambert."

"Why, yes; the teacher. She said you asked her to come, and I took care of her —"

"Oh," I said, as I recalled my visitor of the afternoon.

All my suspicions were suddenly confirmed and I groaned inwardly. The week had been a costly one already; how much more was to be added?

"How much did she get from you?" I said.

"John" — there was reproof and sorrow in my wife's tones — "You're tired, dear, but you mustn't speak that way about Miss Lambert, as though— as

though she were just a common woman. She's very unusual, and of course she couldn't tell you what she needed the money for and I was glad to help her a little."

"What do you mean she couldn't tell me?" I said. "She told me that she needed text-books and I gave her five dollars this afternoon."

"For text-books, yes; but that wasn't her real need. The poor dear was simply shivering in the cold. John, she simply couldn't go through the winter that way without any underwear. I gave her ten dollars, and —"

"Ten and five and ten is twenty-five," I said a little savagely, for I was tired. "That's a pretty good week for a couple of deep brown eyes and a pretty voice! How do you know she didn't have any decent underwear? Did you —"

"John," said my wife, "sometimes you're absolutely vulgar.— Of course I didn't — she told me so. I know

she wouldn't tell an untruth — not with those eyes."

"With that we went to bed; and the next morning I set down twenty-five dollars in the book wherein is recorded treasure which may be laid up in heaven but will certainly never be repaid on earth. If one is not a good loser he has no business in the ministry.

But if I forgot Miss Lambert, she apparently had no intention of forgetting me. I stepped down from the pulpit at the close of the service the next Sunday morning to find a fine-faced old man waiting to speak to me.

"I am Mr. Mason," he said. "I merely wanted to tell you that I provided for Miss Lambert and was very glad to be of service — very glad indeed. A very remarkable young lady, sir; I wish you would tell me about her."

"But I don't know anything about her," I protested. "I never saw her but once in my life."

"What?" flamed the old gentleman. "You mean to say you did not send her to me?"

"By no means" I said. "Was it text-books or underwear?"

He returned my look guiltily. "Underwear," he said. "She said that you sent her to me. I was very busy in the office, and should not have seen her except for your name. But when she came in, I was so impressed with her, that I departed from my invariable rule in such matters and gave her ten dollars. She doesn't seem like a woman who would lie —"

"No," I said emphatically, "she doesn't!"

"And it was so apparently distasteful to her to ask," he continued. "Manifestly a lady does not like to speak of such things —"

"I am sorry to say it," I replied, "but I am afraid Miss Lambert *does* like to speak of such things. That is the

second suit of underwear for which she has secured money this week to my knowledge."

"Impossible!" said the old man and I was sorry for him.

It's a distressing thing to see poison poured into the sweet spring of charity. A long time would elapse before he would yield to another request for aid, however worthy, and I knew it.

"I am glad you warned me, sir," he said, stiffly. "I shall be more careful in the future."

In the next two weeks I was called on the telephone or written to or disturbed by personal visits no less than a dozen times by people who had been approached by Miss Lambert. In all cases they were distinctly pleased with themselves, glad to have been of service to a friend of mine, and *such* a delightful friend! They would be glad to hear more about her, and to be allowed to help again if I thought it nec-

essary. It was very distressing that so attractive and cultivated a woman should be compelled to seek aid — and in a matter of such delicacy — and so forth. Thus the conversation started, and generally it ended by an aggrieved and insulted individual's stamping out of my study, convinced that in some way I had been responsible for the perpetration of a fraud upon him.

The climax came at the regular Monday morning meeting of the ministers of our denomination. Dawson of the Third Church came up to tell me how glad he was to have been of help to Miss Lambert in her difficulty, when Thornton of Pacific Avenue Church overheard him.

"Did she go to you, too?" he demanded of Dawson, and his big laugh rang out boisterously. "Why she caught Smith of Park Avenue, and Edmunds. They contributed a set of lingerie each and goodness knows

how many others have done the same thing.

"Gentlemen!" he shouted, and pounded on a table. "Will all the brethren who have been visited by Miss Lambert, a friend of our Brother —Jones (naming me) please hold up their right hands."

A dozen hands went up, some of them belonging to the leading pastors of the city. I blushed to the roots of my hair, and attempted to be heard, but Thornton's big voice made it impossible.

"I am authorized to say for Brother Jones that all of you — you members of the Lambert Lingerie Club — will lunch today at the Pritchard House at his expense."

A roar of applause greeted the announcement, For a rough and tumble, rowdy lot — get them off by themselves — nothing can equal a crowd of preachers; and when it comes to eating!

— That luncheon, I believe, cost me something like eleven dollars. I entered that also on the Lambert account, and that week, to my intense relief, the police, to whom I had reported her case, informed me that she had left the city.

There were others in the city far better known than I, men whose names could command an *entrée* almost anywhere in the country. These continued to hear of Miss Lambert as she progressed on her travels. Friends of theirs in other cities, or other pastors in our denomination would write to say that Miss Lambert had called upon them, and that they had been glad to provide for her necessities. Sometimes it was text-books that she wanted, sometimes underwear, her requests depending generally upon the season. Text-books in summer; underwear in winter; underwear in the north, and text-books in the milder south. Altogether she must have travelled thousands of miles in

the next two years, using the same stories with which she had first prevailed upon us. But apparently she had forgotten my name, at least no one ever wrote to me about her.

And then suddenly I returned to my office after a summer vacation to find the desk piled high with mail. Among the letters was this:

"Dear Dr. Jones,— *It is seldom that I have an opportunity to do a kindness which afforded me so much pleasure as my little experience with your friend Miss Lambert to-day. She is, of course, a stranger in the city, and I was greatly touched by her need. May I add also that she appealed to me as an exceedingly cultured and charming woman, one of the most charming whom I have ever met. You may not recall me, but I was formerly an occasional attendant at your church, and two years ago you conducted my dear wife's funeral.*

"*Can you tell me anything more about Miss Lambert?*"

Could I? As I sat there with that letter before me, all the trials and tribulations and wretchedness of spirit which had come to me as the gift of Miss Lambert paraded one after another before my mind. My spirit of charity was at rather low ebb, anyway — whose is not when he has just been haled out of the woods to face another year's hard work? — and before I had finished that rather bitter review I was in the right mood to dictate a very unministerial letter. Fortunately my stenographer was a little late in arriving that morning, and before she put in appearance I had calmed myself to this point:

"My dear Mr. Rogers, — *I regret to note by the postmark how long a time your letter has awaited my return from the country. It must have arrived soon after*

*I left for my vacation. I trust you will pardon this delay, therefore.*

*"I remember you very pleasantly, and shall hope to see you when you are in the city again. I regret that I cannot express the same sentiment in regard to Miss Lambert. My experience with her and that of my friends, has been exceedingly unfortunate. To be perfectly frank with you, Miss Lambert, is not an honest woman. She is a college graduate, talented, and as you say, exceedingly attractive. Her offending is therefore more grievous, because she might so easily make a good living and an honest living. I know of few women better equipped to do so. Yet she has formed this fatal habit of deceit which has been so long with her as to become almost a disease. She would rather steal than work.*

*"I do not say that she is hopeless: the Scriptures, I believe, record the case of one woman, similarly attractive, out of whom were cast seven devils. Miss Lam-*

*bert might be rehabilitated in like manner. But I am compelled to say that unless she has changed greatly since my last experience with her your safest course will be to hand her over to the police.*"

The mail was very heavy that day, and there were a number of visitors. When I went to the church the next morning a carriage stood in front of my office door, and as I entered the office a man rose and spoke to me. He was clean-shaven, well-dressed, and apparently about thirty-five years of age.

"I am Mr. Rogers," he said.

"I remember you very well," I answered, "I have just come back from my vacation, and found your letter only yesterday morning."

"It is about that I want to speak to you. Rather I want to thank you. You have been of very great service to me, Doctor."

"Oh don't mention it Mr. Rogers, it was nothing, really —"

"Pardon me, Doctor; it was everything. It was the mention of your name that first caused me to see Miss Lambert. I was very busy that morning; I perhaps should have allowed my assistant to turn her away but for that —"

A terrible intimation of what was to come crept over me:

"You got my letter?" I faltered.

"No, no letter. When you did not reply I came to the conclusion that you must be on your vacation. But by that time I really needed no information from you about Miss Lambert. I had discovered for myself more than you could ever tell me — that she is the sweetest and purest and finest little woman in the world."

"You mean —"

"That we were married a week ago yesterday. I should have been glad to have had you perform the ceremony,

but Miss Lambert — or, rather Mrs. Rogers — loves the country. No city church nor city minister, she said — just some quiet stone church away in the country —"

I did my very best to look happy; I murmured some conventional congratulation and wrung his hand. But the dreadful horror of that letter was upon me: the thought of it stalking him about on his honeymoon, being forwarded after him from place to place, and finally leaping upon him in the first hour of their home life together made me fairly sick. I could hardly wait for him to go; it seemed as though he would linger on forever shaking my hand and thanking me for his happiness. At last the door shut, and in the same instant I landed in the outer office beside the desk of my stenographer.

"Miss Emerson, please put on your hat and go to the post office at once. It is very important. See the post-

master personally; no one else will do. That letter to Mr. Rogers — it must not be delivered; ask him as a special favor to hold it until I can call and explain —"

"But I haven't mailed it yet, Doctor."

"What?" I stammered. "Are you sure?"

"Yes. There were so many letters yesterday that I didn't get to it. I just signed it, a few minutes ago."

I sank into the nearest chair, pretty nearly exhausted. "Give it to me!" I said — "and the carbon, too." And with my own hands I tore both into a hundred fragments and threw them into the wastebasket.

I have never seen The Lingerie Lady since; and it may be that no one in the world but me knows that she and the respected wife of a leading citizen in one of our suburbs are the same woman. But I know. And should her husband die it would not surprise me to find her

again some morning at my study door waiting to tell me that his estate had proved valueless, that she must return to teaching, and that she would appreciate the loan of a few dollars — for text-books, if it should happen to be summer; for suitable underwear if she should come in winter. The love of the game was deeply embedded in her soul. And in all the world I have never met any woman so equipped to play it well — by her manner, her voice and — her eyes.

# III

# THE VOICE OF THE LORD

## THE VOICE OF THE LORD

### THE THIRD OF THE EXPERIENCES

IF I did not think that some good brother had already done so I should write an article some day called "The Minister's Mail." But I am quite certain that it has already been done; I have an indistinct recollection of having read the article myself and of laughing at this letter, which was quoted as having arrived in one morning's mail:

"DEAR SIR, — *I shall be at church next Sunday morning and will put one dollar in the contribution box if you will preach from this text, 'And he took him by the tail!'*"

Almost any minister could write a similar article, and it would be very rich in humor and in pathos — and in emotions of various sorts, a tangled bit of grand opera mingling notes from many discordant heart strings. There would be requests for aid and confessions of doubt; pleas for advice in love affairs and domestic tribulation; an occasional word of commendation and letters of criticism, more than occasional, with now and then a fragment of denunciation or threat. There are a hundred letters in my collection, any one of which, followed up, would have led into the heart of an adventure. And some of them *were* followed up.

"I wonder who that is from," my wife said, as she laid the mail on the breakfast table one morning. It was a lavender letter of rich, fine material, addressed in a woman's handwriting.

"We'll see," I answered, and opened

it. There was neither address, nor date line nor signature. It read simply:

"*Tomorrow at eight I shall be there. Be ye ready.*"

"Who *is* that from," said my wife again, this time with a little added emphasis, for even a minister's wife is human and a woman.

"You know as much about it as I do, my dear. I never saw the handwriting before. Are we to be home tomorrow at eight?"

"You have to go to that reception later in the evening."

"That's all right," I answered. "She'll be here before I have to leave. And we'll see — if she's good looking maybe I'll take her along."

"That's a good idea" said my wife, and laughed. But I noticed she kept the letter.

I was hard at work in the study the next morning when the maid brought in a card and laid it on my desk. The

first name and middle initial meant nothing to me; but the surname is one that has an honored place in our literature. In one corner was inscribed, in the handwriting of the letter, "The Voice of the Lord."

"Show her in," I said; and a moment later she entered, a woman, tall and with a certain dignity of face and manner. She advanced to the middle of the room and stood silent, her eyes fixed on my face, until the maid's footsteps had pattered off down the hall and she knew that we were entirely alone.

In the interval I had plenty of time to study her features. Her hair was grey, though she couldn't have been more than thirty-seven or eight: her forehead was high and fine, her cheeks a trifle drawn; and her chin, though well formed, bore just a suggestion of instability. But it was her eyes that told the story. There was the weird,

unwholesome gleam in them that can be kindled by intoxicants or by unbridled emotion, or that may be the signal of a mind undone. She had poured oil of some unholy sort into her life's fire; it flamed fitfully and lurid through the windows of her soul.

"I am here," she announced. Her voice was full and deep, as though much employed in public speaking.

"You have me somewhat at a disadvantage," I began.

But she had evidently marked out the channel in which the conversation was to be conducted, and she would not be tempted from it.

"You know me, though you may not admit it. You have heard of my grandfather," — and she spoke a name much honored in our literature. "I write, also," she continued. "You have seen my articles in the magazines."

Being thus reminded, I did recall

having seen her name once or twice in some of the lesser periodicals, and said so. She seemed pleased.

"I am a great writer," she said.

I smiled a little, and she was quick to notice it.

"You laugh, but I tell you I could be famous — more famous than my grandfather. I know it — I know the power that is in me. But I have abandoned writing; I have said 'Get thee behind me!' I cannot write and be true to my mission."

"Your mission?" I questioned. "What is your mission?"

"The Lord has commanded me to restore prophecy upon the earth. As Nathan appeared before David, as John the Baptist appeared before Herod, so I appear before the powerful of the earth. I am The Voice of the Lord; I appear before you. I say: 'Thus saith the Lord. Thou art untrue to

thy trust. Why is thy preaching not my preaching? Why hast thou proved unfaithful to the truth?'"

By this time I knew that I had to deal with one of the religious cranks who are part of the minister's problem. Nearly every week some one of them comes to urge his right to be heard at the Sunday morning service or to present some obscure passage of Scripture as containing a new revelation too long neglected.

"I have no doubt the Lord speaks to you," I said. "But he speaks to me also and to every one of his children. I, too, am commissioned to proclaim his gospel on the earth: I must speak his message as I understand it. I am glad to have met you."

But she would not be turned aside.

"You say you are a true minister," she said, her voice rising into sharp, bitter scorn. "Show me proof of your ministry. Your Master healed the sick;

do you heal? He said, 'These signs shall follow them that believe: they shall cast out devils: they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover.' Show signs: The Voice of the Lord says to you, 'Show signs.'"

"I will show signs of my ministry when you show signs of yours," I replied.

"What do you mean?"

Her voice was more shrill; she was working herself fast toward hysteria and I was eager to have her gone. As I answered I stepped over to the door and opened it

"Why don't you quote the whole of the Lord's promise?" I demanded. "This sign too, he says, shall follow them that believe: 'if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them.' There is a drug store across the street. Come: we will go over. You believe that if you drink any deadly thing it will not hurt you, don't you?"

She opened her mouth as though to reply, and then with a savage glance brushed by me to the front door. There she turned for an instant:

"Hypocrite! Blasphemer!" she fairly shrieked. "I leave you; but you shall yet hear The Voice of the Lord. You shall hear me. You shall obey —" and so, turning every dozen steps to hurl her threats back at me, she made her way down to the street. Our house stood a long way back and as she reached the sidewalk she raised her right arm above her head and shouted to me: "The Lord will proclaim me before the city. He will make the people acknowledge me; he will make you."

"When he does," I thought, "it will be a much colder day than it is now." And noting with gratitude that the street was deserted and our little scene apparently unobserved I shut the door and went back to work.

The next morning there was another lavender letter in the mail.

"You cast me out last night," it said, "even as the priests cast out the prophets of old. But The Voice of the Lord will be heard. The Lord will reveal me to the city, and you shall be the instrument of that revelation."

"A strange case," I said, and tossed the letter over to my wife. "She might have been a brilliant woman — writes well and all that — and she's sure the Lord is on her side. And I am to be 'the instrument of the revelation,' whatever that means."

"Whatever it means," said my wife, "I think you better have me around the next time any prophetesses come to call."

"You can't make me feel bad that way," I replied. "Take her, my dear; she is yours. I'm going to write her and say, 'Dear Madam: Please address all future communications to my wife.'"

"You needn't write her at all," said the dearest woman in the world. "Let her alone; you'll probably never hear of her again."

But for once the dearest woman was wrong. The letters kept coming for some weeks — one every morning — each reaffirming her divine commission and warning me that some day I should be the means of establishing her claim before the world. She became a familiar institution in our household. "The Voice of the Lord," the children called her; and when her letters ceased coming, as they did after a month or so, we rather missed them.

I had found out something about her in the meantime. Edgerton of the Third Church told me. He was probably the best known minister in the city, a fine elderly man of national reputation.

"She came to see me several years ago," he said. "It was after a big missionary convention here, and one of

our women had read a really remarkable paper. I forget the subject now, but it was the talk of the convention, and the newspapers commented upon it. The next morning your friend called on me and introduced herself.

"'Did you hear that paper by Mrs. Blank yesterday?' she asked.

"I told her I had and thought it was fine.

"'I wrote it' she said. 'I write most of the papers for these wealthy women that have more money than brains.'

"I was amazed and somewhat disgusted.

"'What you say may be true,' I told her, 'but if it is the betrayal of their confidence does not commend you to mine.'

"Then she told me a good deal about herself. She is brilliant and of good family. But her people have long since cast her off. You see, she is an opium fiend."

After the letters ceased coming I lost sight of The Voice of the Lord and she dropped finally out of memory. Once, indeed, I saw an article in one of the magazines signed by her name; it was a rather bitter attack upon the churches because of their indifference to the appeals of those in want. Once I heard that she had been arrested in a distant city for interrupting religious meetings, and the papers devoted some little space to a half-crazed interview which she had given and signed by a weird pseudonym, which she called her prophetic name. But I paid little attention to it.

Almost a year later, in passing a little church a couple of blocks from my own I was attracted by the sound of singing inside. The church had been vacant for some months, the congregation having moved further up town, away from it; and it had been offered, I knew, for sale. I was on my way to my own service and was too busy to stop; but

later I inquired of our janitor, who was my source of information on any matter connected with the neighborhood.

"What's going on in the little church, Pete?" I asked him.

"Some woman's started a religion there," he answered. "Jehovasha, she calls herself, or something like that; and say, Doctor, she's got 'em goin', too."

"What do you mean, 'got 'em goin'?"

"It's crowded every Sunday. They claim she's got some power to do miracles." He looked at me quizzically. "Say, Doctor, you don't think there is any miracles these days now do you?"

"I don't see why there can't be, Pete. The Lord hasn't lost any of his power. Tell me more about Jehovasha — is that the name?"

"That's what she calls herself, sir, but I'm thinkin' that it's a fake name. Like as not she's a married woman or got somethin' else crooked in her past.

No one knows where she comes from or who she is. Least I ain't found none that does. We was discussin' it the other night over at O'Keefe's — beg pardon, sir, over at the Y. M. C. A., sir — and someone said as how she just dropped down here one Sunday and began preachin' on the street, sayin' that she was the true preacher and all other preachers was fakes and she'd show 'em up, and come unto her all that was sore at the churches: and if anybody was sick, come along too because the doctors was fakes also and devils. She would cure 'em and nothing charged, only glorify the Lord and each one chip in whatever he wanted. And while she was preachin' someone came up with a crutch, and says: 'I'm lame and the doctors can't do nothin' and if you got the goods the way you say, why cure me, and if you don't cure me why you're a fake.'

"She sort o' looked at him queer

and her eyes was flashin' and she says:—

"'God has sent you as a proof for the wicked. In the name of the Almighty chuck that crutch!'

"I wasn't there myself, but O'Keefe swears he seen it. The feller sort of straightened up and shouts:

"'I'm cured; glory to God!'

"Then he chucks the crutch, and everybody shouts and begins to throw quarters and nickels at Jehovasha, and the kids run in to get the money, and they was a fight. But next Sunday she started goin' in the little church, and they's been a crowd there ever since."

The next morning I opened the paper to find a story about Jehovasha on the front page and a flash-light photograph of the inside of her church, crowded with worshippers. She herself was shown as merely a little blue haziness behind the pulpit. The story was one of those overdrawn, sensational tales

which find their way to the front page on Monday mornings, when there is no news in the world. It told of "Jehovasha's" sudden appearance in the city and of her first "Miracle," which Pete had described though this account was not so picturesque, on the whole, as his. No one knew her origin, it said, nor her true name. To all inquiries she replied merely that she was Jehovasha, the prophetess of the Lord, and that she had been sent to restore true religion to the city and to call the ministers and the churches to repentance.

After that there was something in the papers about her on almost every Monday morning. One Sunday she had held a special meeting for cripples and after a half-crazed exhortation, which had brought the whole congregation to a pitch of near insanity, she had shouted that the spirit of the Lord was descending upon them in healing power,

and that whoever would lift up his arms and glorify Jehovah would be healed. An indescribable pandemonium had ensued. Men had shouted and women had cried; crutches had been thrown towards the platform, and some who had not walked unaided for years, hypnotized by the excitement of the occasion and raised into veritable frenzy, had danced up and down in the aisles. It was such a scene as one may witness at the older shrine; such scenes as I have beheld in Dowie's Tabernacle and in a dozen other places. The next morning her "twelve apostles," as she termed a dozen of her followers, were busy nailing crutches and braces of various sorts to the walls of the church. After that her little tabernacle became too small for the crowds that sought admittance. They overflowed into the street, and sometimes she stood in a window and hurled her piercing sentences down among them.

She had a peculiarly alert sense of news value. There was always something in her sermons that the papers could seize upon and for several months she was a regular help in the time of their Monday-edition trouble. She was bitter against the doctors and the preachers; and as time went on her excoriations became rather galling to some of the more sensitive brethren of the city. Two of them who had been most severely handled by her at length prevailed upon the police to have her locked up as a public nuisance and disturber of the peace.

I heard about it Sunday night from Pete, and it seemed to me a most unfortunate action. Whatever her vagaries, or those of any other speaker, I have never relished the idea of police interference in the matter of free speech. Moreover, there was no surer way to give form and substance to her movement than by awarding her the crown

of the martyr. All her charges against the churches would gain redoubled power with the unthinking in the light of this apparent attempt to quiet her by persecution.

It was in this frame of mind that I went home Sunday night. Monday morning I picked up the paper to find her name as usual on the front page, and — to my surprise and consternation — my own linked with it.

From the old, yellowed newspaper clipping before me as I write I copy the headlines:

JEHOVASHA ARRESTED
SPECTACULAR PROPHETESS JAILED
FOR DISTURBING PEACE
SAYS THE LORD WILL SEND DR. JONES
AND DR. EDGERTON TO DELIVER HER
PRAYS AND SINGS IN CELL, AND
PROMISES TO BE DELIVERED THIS
MORNING

The reporters were at the telephone before I had finished my breakfast. I put them off with evasive answers and got Edgerton on the wire.

"What do you think about it?" I said.

"It's a shame she was ever locked up," he replied. "The woman's a drug fiend and probably insane, but she's harmless."

"Just what I think; but what are we going to do?"

He hesitated a moment and then his great laugh rang out heartily. "I don't see how we can let the Lord fall down on his promises," he said. "I'll meet you at the police station in half an hour."

So we two delivered her as she had announced that we should. The warden brought her out into his own office. As she stepped through the door, there was something familiar in her features — in her proud carriage and the uncanny gleam in her eye. I recognized her sud-

denly as the Voice of The Lord, the woman who for a month had written me daily letters. She was older and worn, and the finger of death had placed its mark upon her brow. In the drawn, discolored corners of her mouth, and the sunken places about her eyes there were the unmistakable signs that the drug had almost finished its evil work. But her spirit was apparently unbroken.

We talked with her a long time, Edgerton and I. We told her that we had come to deliver her because we believed she had been mistreated, but that we could not agree to go on her bond unless she was willing to leave the city and return to her relatives. At first she refused but when we made as though to go away, she broke down and throwing herself upon us, pled with us not to leave her in jail. So we arranged for her bail and adjusted matters with the police officers, the district attorney and the two brethren, who were willing

to forget the charge they had preferred. Edgerton agreed to see her to a train and to telegraph her people in the city, where her name is and always has been an honored one.

She had stopped crying and while we were busy with the telephone, and the legal papers, her eyes followed me from place to place, a strange look in them that seemed, in spite of her fear, something almost approaching a smile. Finally she spoke:

"I won, didn't I, Doctor?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I told you the Lord would glorify me and that you would be the instrument of my glory. You are, aren't you? A week from now I'll be forgotten around here, I suppose. But tomorrow" — she gave a little fitful chuckle — "tomorrow the papers will say that my prophecy was fulfilled, that the Lord sent Dr. Jones and Dr. Edgerton to deliver me. Won't they?"

"No, they won't," I answered — "not if Edgerton and I have any influence with the city editors they won't. They won't say anything more about you — ever."

She was silent for a time, until Edgerton stepped over to help her on with her coat. Grasping it with one hand, she turned and raised the other above her head, facing me with a pathetic remnant of something like her old time fire.

"The Voice of the Lord!" she said. "He sent you to deliver me, to be the instrument of my glory. If you don't believe me, ask him. When you pray to him, ask him. He will tell you I was sent to restore prophecy upon the earth."

As I looked at her, her shrunken arm quivering in the air, her every feature lined with the handwriting of death, my heart was in my throat.

"You ask him," I answered, "You will see him first."

I stood watching her a long way down the street. Leaning lifelessly upon Edgerton's arm, she walked with him to the corner, where they climbed into a cab. Thus she passed forever out of my sight.

# IV

# THE WOMAN DIVIDED

She Came to Sob Out Her Perplexity in My Study

## THE WOMAN DIVIDED

THE FOURTH OF THE EXPERIENCES

MANY times I have thought about her since, and wondered whether she had the courage to keep it up.

She was one of the thousands who make up the ordinary run of women whom ministers meet — one of those good women, undistinguished even in their troubles and their sin. They are the Marthas, "cumbered with much serving"; the Marys, who are the keepers of the world's faith; the widows, who, out of their want, cast into the treasury of service all that they have; and the other Marys, who are remembered gratefully by mankind because they sink their whole existence in the life and development of their sons. These, and

not the women whose stories have been told in the preceding articles, are the usual companions of the pastor's daily travel. There are a thousand good women to make smooth the path of the servant of the Lord for every one who would cause him to stumble. Were it not so, the ministry and the world it ministers to would be very dreary places.

A glance through the diary of a single year recalls so many of those who have cast their little burdens upon the preacher, as the Lord's local representative, that one hardly knows whom to select. There was Miss Dickson, for example, who taught six days a week in the high school, and one day in our Sunday school. She was earnest and attractive and wonderfully good — but when her oldest boy pupil, who was nineteen, persuaded her that she was the only woman in the world who could make his life happy, she came to sob

out her perplexity in my study. She *did* love him — at least she was *sure* she did; at least she *thought* she did — but she was thirty-three — I knew the folly of it and tried to explain. I had had a friend, a boy, who had married a woman nearly twice his age; I knew what their life had been. But in spite of all I could do Miss Dickson and her pupil drifted nearer and nearer the rapids, until the town began to talk, and the parents of the boy came to me also to protest angrily that he was being lured and preyed upon by a designing woman. I invited them all to dinner one night — Miss Dickson, her boy pupil, my friend who had married a woman twice his age and the woman herself, who legally was still his wife, though the love that they thought was divine had long since given place to something that was almost hate. That was a very peculiar dinner — I remember it very well.

There was Mrs. Emmons, whose husband had left her twenty thousand dollars — and the plausible gentleman who sought to acquire it. It cost me no little trouble to discover that gentleman's previous record, but I felt repaid on the afternoon when they both sat in my study together while, in my best pulpit voice, I read it to them.

I remember Elsie Maitland, who came, quivering and tearful, to tell me that her mother objected to Jack, that Jack was the best man in the world and that they were going to be married. Mrs. Maitland came the next day to say that Elsie was not yet of age and that if they ever did carry out their threat to elope she would have Jack arrested, and didn't I think she was right? But that very day Jack, and Elsie made good their threat, and that night Mrs. Maitland rushed back to me with a telegram: "We are married. Coming home to-

morrow on Number 42. Won't you forgive? Elsie." Number Forty-two arrived at four o'clock the next afternoon, and Mrs. Maitland was on the platform with a deputy sheriff. But I had met the train at Roxbury, which was twelve miles up the track.

I remember them all, Heaven bless them. They make up the humor and the pathos, the romance and the bitter trial, and the eternal worth-whileness of the minister's lot. But their stories do not belong in this article. I was speaking, as I recall, of The Woman Divided, and I couldn't help wondering whether she had had the courage to keep it up.

I met him several times before I met her. He was big and self confident and declamatory, even in his clothes. Some one introduced me to him at the horse show, that annual torment for which one of my well-to-do parishioners sent me tickets that I felt bound to use,

and he astonished me by announcing that he intended to take a "box" in my church. I gasped, but recovered myself in time to assure him that he would be welcome. Later I learned that he had recently moved into the biggest house in town, having made his money late in life, out of some patented kind of soap. The next Sunday, just after the first hymn, I saw him at the rear of the church, apparently arguing with the usher, who conducted him, at length, down the aisle and seated him at the very front. He looked up at me and waved his hand affably, but I was busy with the hymn book and pretended not to see.

At the close of the service he was the first to speak to me.

"Fine, Doctor; simply splendid!" His voice boomed out like the biggest pipe on the organ. "I want to come here regular; wish you'd put up my name for membership. And I'd like to

have you come to my house, sir. When will you come?"

I told him I should be glad to call. He pressed the invitation at each succeeding service but for several weeks I was so busy with other duties that I could not find time to redeem my promise. Then one morning I missed him from his place at the front; and, thus reminded of my neglect, I determined to make my call that week.

A butler opened the door — the only butler, I believe, that our little city boasted — and I was ushered into a reception room finished in mahogany and crowded with gold furniture. The butler disappeared upstairs and returned after a few minutes to report that Mr. Dives was absent from the city, but that Mrs. Dives would be down. It was the first time I had heard that there was a Mrs. Dives.

A little later her footsteps pattered softly on the padded stairway and then

stopped suddenly, commanded by a querulous whisper that was shrill enough to reach my own ears.

"Mother, you can't go down: you don't look fit."

It was the voice of a girl, apparently the daughter of the house. I could sense the mother's hesitation and self-consciousness: she stopped, took a step back, and then, as though acting with unaccustomed resolution, continued down. Even as she entered the room I could hear the voice above complaining to somebody that mother looked "perfectly awful," and that she couldn't imagine what could have "got into her."

I suspect that she knew I had heard, for her face was flushed and embarrassed as she stepped through the door and held out her hand to me. She was a little woman whose clothes fitted her badly. Her hair was drawn tight across her forehead, but there was a wistful sort of tenderness in her face which was

attractive. I remember thinking that a little care on the part of someone that understood such things might have made her *very* attractive.

The hand that she held out to me was large in proportion to the rest of her body; but it was well formed.

"Mr. Dives is away," she began, and stopped as though not quite sure what to say next.

"I am very glad of the opportunity to meet you," I replied. "I have not yet had a chance to welcome you to our services."

I thought she might say something in explanation, and indeed she started to but ended with an embarrassed little laugh. I changed the subject quickly. They had been in the city only a few months, she told me, having come from the little out-of-the-way town where her husband's factory had been located. He had sold his interests, which had kept them confined and so here they

were, in a big house, realizing the dreams of their youth.

Once guided into these more familiar channels the conversation ran smoothly, with now and then a bit of sparkle. Indeed, my estimate of Mrs. Dives' charm and intellectual ability grew as our talk proceeded. She was really a very unusual woman and I thought again it was a pity that no one had ever taught her to advertise her charm in her appearance.

As I prepared to leave, I ventured to repeat the hope that she might be present with her husband at our Sunday services; and again, suddenly, her face clouded. The sparkle died out of her manner; she became somehow dull and reserved. It was as complete a transformation as I have ever seen. The woman who had charmed me by her vivacious intelligence vanished, and left in her place the timid creature who had stood shrinking in the doorway.

"I should like to come," she said. "I want—" and then suddenly—"Doctor, may I come to see you sometime at your study?"

"Assuredly," I answered; "come Monday morning."

"Thanks — thank you — thank you so much," she stammered. I wondered what she meant.

Monday morning I looked up from my desk to see a carriage draw up before the door, and after a moment she descended from it, dressed as I had seen her at the house, with the addition of a hat strangely unbecoming. As I watched her walk toward the door I wondered which woman was coming to me — the self-reliant, clear-thinking woman of whom I had caught a glimpse at the house, whose keen mind — so rumor said and so I could well believe — had planned out her husband's success; or the shrinking, timid creature who had drawn back within herself

when I suggested that she come with him to church.

I had not long to wonder; the half-apologetic knock with which she announced her arrival testified that she came in fear and trembling. I sought to increase her confidence with my welcome, and made her as comfortable as I could.

"I'm going to help you," I said, when she had settled herself and while she was casting about in her mind as to how she would begin. "I am going to tell you why you came to me."

She looked at me half fearfully, half gratefully. "Oh, if you only could," she murmured.

"You want to tell me that you can't come to church with your husband because he doesn't want you to come."

It was a long, dangerous chance to take, but I knew instantly by the look in her eyes that I was not mistaken. But the almost brutal frankness of my

statement shocked her into pained protest.

"You mustn't say that, Doctor. Mr. Dives — my husband — is very, very kind to me."

"Kind — surely," I answered. "You mean that he allows you all the money that you need. But why shouldn't he; you helped him to make it."

She was silent and I pressed the point.

"Didn't you?"

"Yes, I did." It was the other woman asserting herself, the woman who had charmed me by the clearness of her thought at our first meeting. "I did help him," she repeated. "He couldn't have done it without me. He bought the formula for the soap from a peddler, but I made it up on my stove in the kitchen. Hours and hours I stirred it in those first years before the factory came. That's why my hands are like this — look at them," and she pushed

them out toward me. "The stirring did that. And now —" her voice faltered and broke a little, "and now he says they're too big —"

It was the other woman back again, timid, cringing, ready almost to cry.

"And he won't take you to church," I said, "because he doesn't think you look well enough. And your daughter patronizes you, and you're tired of it all, and wish you had never helped him to succeed. Is that it?"

I knew it was a rough speech. I had no mind to have her crying in the study. The other woman in her — the strong aggressive one — would resent that attack upon her husband, I thought; and so it proved. She straightened, suddenly, rose and faced me with real dignity.

"I did not come here to have my husband insulted, Doctor Jones. You do not understand. Good morning."

She started to go, but I reached the door before her.

"Now," I said, "we can talk. I wanted you to say that; I wanted to put you in a frame of mind where I could talk to you. You're in that frame of mind now. Sit down; I can help you."

For a moment I thought she would leave, in spite of my plea. When she was finally seated again the defiant look still held its place in her eye. She would not cry now, I felt sure, no matter what I said.

And so I told her the truth very bluntly, drawing generously on my imagination, and guiding myself by her changing expressions, which told her story, had she but known it, as clearly as though it had been acted on a stage. I sketched their life together in the little village, where they had first dreamed the success that his fortunate discovery, and her genius, had at length made real.

I went farther back than that even

— into her girlhood — and introduced to her the two spirits, the two girls, who had inhabited her soul. There was the girl who would dare anything, who led the crowd and counted even some of the boys among her followers; and there was the other girl, who, depressed by a moment of failure, would draw herself away into settled retirement and morbid introspection. I told her story, not in terms of her life, but in terms of the life of these two — the one carrying her husband upward upon the wings of her vision, the other, dormant through their earlier married life because of the vitality of their love and achievement, casting over these later years an evil spirit of introspection and self-pity and neglect.

"You are not a woman," I said. "You are two women. I knew it when I talked with you at your home. You were one woman when you came cringing through the doorway to meet me

and an entirely different woman when the conversation stirred the memory of your days of happiness and success. The second woman demanded much of your husband, and gave him much in return; the other shrivelled under a bit of fancied neglect and thereafter neither demanded nor gave. That's your trouble. You can't blame your husband for leaving the first woman at home. What you must do to be saved is to resurrect the other one, and, having done so, keep her permanently on the throne."

Her eyes were wide open in amazement. "How did you know all that?" she demanded.

"You told me."

"I? I haven't told you anything."

"Yes you have. Every line of it has written itself as plainly as could be on your face; I have merely read out to you what I saw. And I am right, am I not?"

"Yes."

"Then you must trust me absolutely. You must do exactly what I say; you must carry it through no matter what the cost."

Then I told her what she must do. At first she was incredulous; the doubting woman in her lifted up a voice of protest. But I convinced her at length. We pored over the time-table and laid out her route to New York. Then I sent her over to the parsonage to talk with Mrs. Jones and to secure the addresses of those artificers in New York who by means of gowns and hair-dressing and facial massage, and heaven knows what else, can bring back to life the soul of a woman that has been a long time dead.

"But how shall I tell my husband?" she demanded, as she was about to leave the study.

"Tell him what?"

"That I am going."

"Don't tell him," I said. "Write him. Just go."

She went. I hope Heaven has forgiven me for the deception that enshrouded those next two weeks. True, I have never prayed to be forgiven, considering that the end justified the means, but at least I have promised never to do it again. For they were two terrible weeks.

Three days after she had gone I met Dives on the street. Rather, I took occasion to meet him. It was a necessary part of the day's work — just as necessary as the long letter that went every night to Mrs. Dives in the city, telling her that under no circumstances must she come home until I sent for her, and commanding her — that is the right word — to buy new dresses, no matter how tired she got or how much they cost.

"Won't you and Mrs. Dives come up to dinner tonight?" I said to Dives,

and I ought to have blushed with guilt at the words.

"Thanks ever so much," he responded, "but Mrs. Dives is out of the city for a day or two. Gone to New York on a little pleasure trip." He said it jauntily — a little too jauntily, I thought.

I went home to find another letter from Mrs. Dives saying that she was homesick and must come back. And I wired her sternly that if she let the weak woman in her creep into another letter I should never attempt to help her again. Whether that rebuke drove the weak woman into retirement or whether the wiles of the dressmaker and the hair-dresser had wakened the strong one into full life I do not know. But from that time her letters took on a new, confident, happy note which had in it all the joy of her earlier days, and included also the self-assurance of a woman who knows her world and feels herself a mistress in it.

I had purposely let Dives alone for a week, but when with her letter she enclosed one from him complaining because she did not come back, I knew it was time to talk with him again.

"You and Mrs. Dives are coming to dinner tonight," I said to him over the telephone.

He was flustered; I could read it in the tones of his reply.

"Awfully kind of you, Doctor; but you see — The truth is Mrs. Dives hasn't got back yet — unexpected delay, you understand."

"That's too bad," I replied. "We'd like to have you both; but we'll have *you* anyway. Six-thirty sharp. We'll count on you" — and I hung the receiver up before he had a chance to refuse.

It was a different man who dined with us that night. He had lost much of his jauntiness, and though he made a brave effort to maintain his usual

blustering good fellowship the result could hardly be termed a success. There were rings under his eyes, as though he had lost sleep, and the hand that reached out to take his cup of coffee shook a little. But not until late in the evening did we let the conversation drift to the subject which was uppermost in all our minds. My wife, whose generalship can always be counted on in matters of the kind, delivered the first shot.

"We enjoy Mrs. Dives so much. She is perfectly charming. She is going to join our Ladies' Society."

Dives could not conceal his astonishment. His wife in a Ladies' Society! She hadn't joined anything since the day she first began to stir the soap — he had long ago lost any thought of her as a social being.

"Yes," I hastened to add, "and why didn't you tell us that she sang? She's going to join our choir, too."

"She's a wonderful little woman,"

mused my wife. "When does she come back?"

"I really don't — That is to say — I'm going up to New York day after tomorrow — yes, we've arranged to meet there and come back together."

He was preparing to go.

"You must both of you come to dinner when you get back," I said. "Mrs. Dives has told me so much about your life that I feel as though we were all very old friends."

"She's a wonderful little woman," mused my wife again.

He turned upon her with something like his old buoyant spirit. "She certainly is," he said, "a perfect wonder."

"Day after tomorrow," he had said. That gave me time to get my letter to her if I wrote it that night. And so I did, sitting up late to finish it and walking down alone through the quiet streets to drop it in at the post office. And I trembled almost as I saw it dis-

appear through the slot in the door; for there are times when even a preacher shrinks back at the thought of reaching his hand down so deep into the recesses of a human soul. Yet I told her the truth as I saw it. There is no copy of the letter, but I remember a part at least of what it said:

"DEAR MRS. DIVES,— *It is time now to come home. As soon as you receive this, wire your husband that you will arrive on Number Forty-two and ask him to meet you. Do not delay; because he plans to start for New York on Wednesday to bring you back with him, and it is better, I think, that you should meet him here.*

"*You are not different from many other sensitive women, or indeed men, for that matter. I have known many like you, whose lives were really a battlefield on which two natures contended for the mastery. Most poets and generals, villains and preachers are of that sort — most all*

*of the really worth-while folks in the world. You realize it now that I have pointed it out to you. You see that it explains everything in your life which you have found hard to understand. You remember how, even in girlhood, the spirit in you that was self-reliant and radiant and optimistic would carry you forward for days or even weeks at a time, only to be set upon and vanquished in some inexplicable fashion by the other spirit, which caused you to draw in upon yourself, to be introspective and unhappy and depressed. In olden days they called it being possessed of a devil — this surrender to the love-sapping, self-conscious spirit. Now we call it simply bad management or inefficiency or selfishness or lack of self-control.*

*"Through the first years of your married life, when your blood ran fast with the joy of achievement, you kept it down — this other spirit; and only in these later years — when you have had less to occupy*

*you, when changes in your life have come fast — has it spread its control insidiously, until, without your realizing it, your real self, the self of your happier, younger days, has been entirely subdued.*

*"I saw it on the afternoon I first met you — the battle of the two spirits. My call came at a happy moment — when something of the old thrill of living was on you — and you came down to meet me in obedience to a sudden impulse, though I venture to say that you had denied yourself to all other visitors since you arrived in town. But the better impulse carried you only to the parlor door. You surrendered to the old spirit there; you cringed — that's a mean little word, but it's true — you would have turned back if you could. While we talked about your earlier life with Mr. Dives and your struggles together, something of the old fire came back; you were a different woman — the charming, enthusiastic, purposeful woman that your husband first*

*loved. And then, as I left you, you shrank back again. You could not come to church, you told me; you seldom went out; Mr. Dives usually went alone. That was your evil spirit in the saddle again.*

*"You have told yourself that your husband was drawing away from you and that was true in a sense. He has gone on and on in the bounding, buoyant spirit of his youth, meeting new people, growing into new responsibilities, enjoying his life to the full. And you, instead of bounding along at his side, have stood still. Of course he has drawn away from you. You stayed at home when he wanted you to go with him — until after a while he didn't ask you any more. You forgot how to dress; you let his interests multiply without your help; you let your daughter lose her respect for you. And you thought your husband had ceased to love you, when really it was you who had killed the woman whom he used to love.*

*"Now you are coming back. You will*

*be radiant and happy when you alight from the train. You will be prettier than you have been in years, and better dressed. You will be full of the joy of your recent experiences. He will meet you and you will be a new woman to him — or rather the old woman, the woman of his own boyhood dreams. And you must keep him in that spirit.*

*"One word more. Love feeds upon sacrifice; it grows strong only when strong demands are put upon it. You stopped demanding anything of your husband years ago. You must begin demanding of him again — begin the minute you meet him on the platform. He must feel in that minute that you expect to contribute much to his life from now on, and, in turn, to demand much from him. Begin by demanding something in that moment; you might, for instance, drop your glove and let him pick it up. Let him start from that moment to feed his love upon sacrifice — just as you will*

*start to feed it upon optimism, and good cheer and the old vibrant interest in his affairs.*

"*I shall not see you when you arrive. I have done all that I can for you. From now on you must carry your life forward in your own strength. But I shall pray for you. And you are going to be very happy. Remember that always — very, very happy.*"

I heard Number Forty-two whistle at four o'clock the next afternoon, just as I was stepping out of the barber shop across the street from the station. It is dark at four o'clock in November, and almost without knowing it I turned my steps in the direction of the station. I could not resist the temptation; the thought of the two had been with me all day.

His carriage was at the end of the platform. I slipped behind it and came up among the group at the station door without being observed. He was pacing

restlessly up and down at the place where the single Pullman car on Forty-two would stop. He did not see me, nor anything else, apparently. His eyes were turned intently to the oncoming locomotive, which pitched and swayed and finally halted. With one bound he was on the platform of the Pullman. He was nervous, almost painfully so — but hardly more nervous than I.

Which woman would come down, I wondered — the strong self-reliant, radiant woman, or the tired, depressed, shrinking one. Would she slink into his arms or would she stand straight and smiling, waiting for him to take her? Would it be the wife of his youth who came back to him or the wife of his last three years?

All this raced through my mind in an instant, while a bent old man was making his way painfully out of the car and onto the platform. Then suddenly, almost with a bound, it seemed to me,

she alighted. She was new-robed from head to foot in clothes of a style that had not yet reached our little city. Her veil was pushed back in that alluring way that women know, and her face fairly shone. I slipped up beside them: I could not help it and they never knew — they would hardly have turned had I shouted in their ears.

"Marion," he cried, and took her in his arms. "Oh, Marion, it's good to have you home!"

And then the great thing happened. She gave a startled little cry, and pointed to the car.

"Oh George, quick —" she said, "I've left my purse on the car!"

I saw him leap again for the platform and a moment later, just as I turned the corner of the station, I looked again, to see him swing off the end of the last coach, waving her purse in his hand and smiling like a boy out of school.

They went away to Europe that winter. He told me boyishly that they had planned it out and dreamed about it years before, but that lately his wife had rather given up the idea. And before they returned I had been called away to another charge. But I have thought of them many times in the years that have passed, and wondered whether she has had the courage and the power to keep it up.

I believe she has.

# THE SHADOW ON THE SCREEN

## THE SHADOW ON THE SCREEN

THE FIFTH OF THE EXPERIENCES

I DO not pretend to explain every detail of this story. Those for whom there are no mysteries under the sun, who brush aside every manifestation of the Unknown with the mere murmur of their charm word "coincidence" will, of course, find nothing in it worthy of explanation. But I confess that I have never succeeded in bringing myself into that easy-going, undiscriminating attitude of mind. There have been too many experiences in my ministry that have passed beyond the border of the finite; too many occasions when, coming to a sudden rift in the road, I have stretched out my hand and felt it closed in the strong

grasp of a hand I could not see. Every minister who has kept the faith knows the rich reality of such experiences.

One of them came in the very first year of our work, when the drouth had blasted the crops of our people and we, with them, stood within the very shadow of want. I remember how on the day when our last dollar had gone for relief, when I did not know where we should find food for another meal, there came a letter from an almost-forgotten friend in the North, and in it a check for $100. "Coincidence," you say. But was it merely a coincidence that the help should come from an apparently impossible source in the very moment of our extremity? Perhaps it was; but I cannot think so.

I remember that when the message came my little boy, a thousand miles away, lay dying, and I remember the agony of spirit in which for seven hours I wrestled with the Lord, that life might

be returned to him. Suddenly, just as the sun dipped behind the horizon, a voice as clear as any voice I have ever heard said, "Peace, be still! Your son lives." Sunset was at five-thirty that day; I was concerned enough to look it up in the daily newspaper. And it was just at that hour, so his mother told me afterwards, that our little boy, a thousand miles away, turned his hot fevered face to the wall and dropped into a saving sleep. There are those who will be satisfied to label that, too, a "coincidence"; it pleases me to know that it was the voice of God.

And so with the Widow Marshall—for even to this day I cannot recall that she had any other name. I only know that her boy *did* come back, and in the way here set down. But whether the circumstances of his return were of chance occurrence or in fulfillment of faith I leave each one of you to answer for himself.

On my arrival my predecessor in the parish had described her to me. I have always remembered him very gratefully because of that. Ordinarily a minister comes into a new parish after his predecessor has left and without friends or acquaintances to whom he may look for advice; and the wonder is that he ever survives the diplomatic demands and exigencies of the first few weeks. In this case, however, the predecessor, good shepherd that he was, went over the whole flock, calling each sheep by name from the greatest even to the least, from the whitest through the brown and dark brown and even to the black. When he had finished I knew enough about the individual characteristics and idiosyncracies of my new charges to guard me from offending any of them at the outset.

But the Widow Marshall he did not mention at all until I called his attention to the fact that he had passed over her name.

"Oh, you needn't bother much about her," he said. "She's just a poor old widow who lives away out on the edge of things somewhere. A good worker, though; always on hand to help with the church suppers and all that. I meant to call on her sometimes but you know how it is — and of course she's not really very important."

"Does she have any family?" I asked.

"No. Wait! Let's see — there is some story about her having a boy who went away — now how is that?" He passed his hand back and forth across the bald spot on his head — which was his habit when perplexed — but apparently the friction provoked no further remembrance. "She has a story," he added finally. "Somebody told me her story once — but I can't remember. And, anyway, she's not very important. Might be a good plan for you to call on her sometime, though, after you've called on the folks who expect it."

And I made up my mind I *would* call.

The church gave us a reception — a horrible habit churches have in welcoming a new pastor — and all the membership filed by us in a long, bewildering procession, leaving us with weary hands and arms and a confused babble of names in our minds. When there was a little break, I caught eagerly at the suggestion of the wife of one of the trustees that I might look over the arrangement of the church and particularly the kitchen, of which the ladies were very proud.

As we entered the kitchen door I noticed a woman standing at the stove, her sleeves rolled to her elbows and her cheeks suffused with the ruddy glow which the heat imparts. She must have been between forty-five and fifty, with the ample bust and hips that used to be an essential part of all artist's pictures of "mother." Her hair had loosened a little and wreathed about her

face, which was mild and round and mellowed, as though there had been rains of sorrow dispelled by sunbeams of self-forgetfulness more resolute and abiding.

She turned toward us with a half-apologetic little smile, but my guide apparently did not see her. I caught the smile, though, the timid start in our direction, and the embarrassed halt as she saw that we were about to pass her by. In her confusion she dropped a spoon and I hastened to pick it up and hand it to her.

"I am the new minister," I said to her. "I don't think we have met."

My words seemed to add to her confusion. She started to speak, but my guide had bustled up, intent on handling the situation.

"This is Mrs. Marshall, Doctor. — My dear, this is Dr. Jones, our new pastor. — Mrs. Marshall never gets out into the church parlors, Doctor; she always

finds so much to keep her busy here in the kitchen. We all say that she is one of our most useful members."

It was spoken in a voice meant to be kind, but there was an air of condescension which said plainly enough, "You needn't waste any time here, Doctor; it won't be appreciated. This is only Mrs. Marshall; she's not quite in our class, of course, but she's very useful at church dinners." And it did me good to see that Mrs. Marshall, even underneath her timidity, sensed the tone of patronage and resented it.

I determined, in spite of my guide's obvious restlessness, to have a talk with Mrs. Marshall but I was thwarted by a peremptory call from the parlor. I held out my hand, and she took it in her big, motherly clasp, still moist from the dishwater.

"I am coming to call on you very soon," I said. "I want to know the really important members of the con-

gregation, the ones that do the real work."

"Oh, thank you," she responded. And then, as though not quite sure of herself, "perhaps — perhaps you and Mrs. Jones would come to supper."

"Supper," I repeated. "Supper! I haven't heard that blessed word since we reached this big city. I had begun to think that nobody here has any supper. You better believe we will come and just as soon as you say the word."

The conversation had not pleased my guide. She turned to me with an affected little laugh as we made our way toward the parlor.

"All things to all men I see, Doctor," she said, "and all women too. Do you know, you said that as though you really meant it?"

But I pretended not to hear her.

I looked for Mrs. Marshall at the following Sunday morning service. It was some time before I discovered her

tucked away under a corner of the gallery. She was gowned in a plain black suit, which even from a distance appeared to have shrunk about her ample figure, but there was a wholesome sincerity in her eager gaze that drew my eyes back to her repeatedly. Perhaps I was just a little homesick. We had come from a country parish to the new church, a large one in an eastern city, and I felt a well-bred aloofness on the part of the congregation, which contrasted jarringly with the rude informality to which we had been accustomed. Through that atmosphere of strangeness, of kindly but rather emotionless reserve, the shining countenance of the Widow Marshall beamed out upon me like a benediction from home. There was no dignified reserve in her; she leaned forward eagerly when I announced the text and her appreciation of the sermon as I developed its several phases was registered in successive waves

of gratification across her sensitive face. If that first sermon was a success, as the influential members of my congregation were good enough to assure me, it was due not to their courteous attention, but rather to the inspiration flashed up to me from the Widow Marshall, who in her features and dress and unaffected interest represented to me the loving solicitude of my own little congregation back home.

Each Sunday she was in her place promptly but always before I could make my way to the door after the service she had slipped quietly away. The weeks lengthened into months and I had still not fulfilled my promise to call. Then one Sunday I preached from the parable of the Prodigal Son. I thought of her as I announced the text and, glancing over, saw that she had edged forward a little farther than usual on her seat and was gazing straight into my face in rapt attention. The

theme is a favorite one with preachers, and he is indeed lacking in imagination and in enthusiasm for his message who can preach upon it without being lifted a little out of himself. As I traced the story of the boy's wanderings, his life in the far country, his final remorse and repentance and return to his father, I forgot the Widow Marshall and all else in my interest in the story. I pictured the Prodigal coming to the top of the hill overlooking his father's house and then starting down the road that led to the gate; I spoke of the father's glad cry of welcome, the feast prepared to celebrate the home-coming and the final hosanna of thanksgiving. "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found." It was then, at the climax of the story, that there was a slight rustle in the rear of the church and I turned in time to see the Widow Marshall slip out, her handkerchief pressed to her eyes.

In that instant there flashed through my mind what my predecessor had told me about her. There was some story, he had said, about her son. I blamed myself that I should have allowed the months to elapse without learning her story, that I had not reserved my sermon on the Prodigal until after my call. Had I by my sermon added to the burden of her grief? Had I drawn a rude hand across her heart strings? I could hardly wait to drop a note to her — addressing it simply to "Mrs. Marshall," for so her name appeared on our church directory list — recalling her promise to have Mrs. Jones and me to supper and asking if we might come some time during the week. On Tuesday the answer arrived, written on a half sheet of note paper, in a prim, old-fashioned hand. She would be very glad, it said, if we would come to supper on Thursday at six o'clock.

We were late, for her cottage stood

clear out beyond the city limits in a section totally unfamiliar to me. As we entered the little gate we heard the music of a parlor organ and a voice, which I knew must be hers, raised in the appealing strains of the old mother chant:

"*Hush my child, lie still and slumber;*
*Holy angels guard thy bed.*"

It was the song that my own mother had sung to each one of her six in succession, and I can never hear it without a little tightening about the heart.

She opened the door for us herself. There was no evidence of the timidity that I had come to expect in her; instead, her greeting had in it a quiet dignity. And I liked the fact that she made no apology for the house or the meal.

"Have you lived here long?" I asked.

"About five years. You see, when my husband died I had to find a home that I could maintain, and finally I came

clear out here. It's a long way out," she smiled, "but there is air and there are flowers and birds."

"I think it's lovely," Mrs. Jones said. I could feel in her voice a trace of longing for our own cottage in the country parish.

There was homesickness in the supper, too: in the big slices of home-made bread; in the butter, home-churned; in the home-made pickles and the big apple pie with the juice fairly bursting through the top. Of all the meals I ever ate in that parish — some of them served by butlers in many courses — there was not one that seemed so wonderfully good as that. In the midst of it a mantel clock struck seven and Mrs. Marshall excused herself for a moment. I watched her curiously as she brought in from the kitchen a little kerosene lamp and set it in the parlor window. I noticed then, for the first time, that she had cut a tiny circle from the centre

of the curtain, just big enough to allow the lamp's rays to shine through. From the outside the house would appear entirely dark except for this little signal of light and love. The Widow Marshall caught the glance of inquiry in our eyes as she returned to the table, and said simply:

"It's for my boy; he is away, you know."

"I know," I said. "Won't you tell us about him?"

She hesitated, but I believe she was really grateful for the suggestion. "I haven't talked about it much," she said. "But — I think you would understand."

"I know we should," I assured her, and she smiled — a slow, lingering smile with a touch of pathos in it.

"It's nearly six years since he went away," she began. "We were still living in Haydensburg at that time."

"Haydensburg, Ohio!" I exclaimed. "Why, that's in our home county."

"I knew it," she responded. "That's why I knew that I should love you as a pastor. From that first night when I saw you at the church in the kitchen I was sure that you would be just like home folks. You see none of the other pastors ever called on me."

I gritted my teeth to keep back the words my tongue would have spoken about those too-busy, too-discriminating predecessors of mine. I think she noticed it, because she smiled again, a little wistfully.

"My husband owned the dry goods store out in Haydensburg, and we were very happy there for many years. He was trustee of the church and president of the village board. He was a very strong, commanding man. I have often thought that in a larger sphere my husband would have achieved a great reputation. We had only one child, our boy Samuel. He was our joy, our whole life. Almost from the day he

was born, my husband began laying plans for his future. They would go into partnership, he said — it would be "Marshall & Son." They would buy the stores in the adjoining towns and build a chain of stores that might stretch across the state. Every business move that he made was planned with the thought of the boy, and it really seemed, as he would talk to me about it, that there would be no limit to what the two might do together."

"And how about the boy?" I asked.

The last vestige of the smile was lost from her face as she answered:

"Do you believe in heredity, Doctor Jones?"

"I do," I said; "I think it explains many things that are otherwise unexplainable."

"I knew you would say so!" she exclaimed. "It's true. All of my ancestors were sea captains. It was their blood pounding in his veins like the

waves on the seashore that called him. I know it was. I tried to tell John so. Oh," she cried, "if he only could have believed it." She paused for a moment, and I thought she would cry, but she regained control of herself with an effort, and made a half-hearted little attempt to smile.

"From the time Sam first began to walk," she continued; "there was no interest in his life but boats. He sailed little boats in the bath tub; he would spend all day long down at the little brook that ran through the meadow by our house. Once he ran away and was gone two days and when we found him at last he said he had decided to be a sailor. That was when he was only seven.

"His father couldn't understand. The Marshalls for generations had never seen any water larger than Lake Erie. His father and grandfather had lived in the same house in Haydensburg; he

couldn't realize that five generations of sea-rovers were calling to my boy — he thought it was just perverseness.

"And Sammy tried — oh, so hard. He worked at his lessons and at night he would sit and try to be interested in the plans that his father had for the business. But I could see the little worry lines in his face that meant he had to drive himself to it. His heart was far away, and it made my soul sick to think of it.

"Something had to happen, of course, for as he grew older he developed a will as strong almost as his father's. There had to be a conflict sometime, and one Saturday night it came. School had closed for the spring vacation. He came bounding in at night, his face glowing, to tell us that with three other boys he had planned a canoe trip to last a week. His father had wanted to have him spend the week at the store. Both of them were tired and impatient, and so

in spite of anything that I could do the quarrel came. Next morning when I went to knock at his door there was no answer." She pressed her handkerchief to her eyes, and it was several minutes before she spoke again.

"That was six years ago," she said. "I have not seen him nor heard from him since. I have managed to live through it somehow" — she forced a wan little smile — "but it was too much for his father. He never realized how much the boy meant in his life until — until he went out of it. For a year he did everything that could be thought of to find some trace, and when everything failed, when there was no more hope, he seemed to lose his grip on life. You see," she faltered, "he thought — that — Sam was dead."

She buried her face in her hands for a moment, and then threw it back almost defiantly.

"But it isn't true," she exclaimed

determinedly; "he is alive; he will come back to me. Every night since he went away I have lit the lamp for him in the window; he will come back!" She rose and, carried away by the stress of her emotion, crossed the room and grasped me by the arm. "Doctor, you are a man of God. Tell me — tell me that he will come back —"

I pulled her gently down upon the old haircloth sofa beside me and spoke very quietly, for she was on the point of a breakdown:

"Your own heart tells you that he will come back, doesn't it?" I asked.

"Yes, yes," she cried, "I know it."

"Then I know it, too," I answered, "for remember this, Mrs. Marshall: God is love, and motherhood is love; both are parts of the same immortal spirit. And the heart of a mother is nearer to the heart of God than anything else in this world. Your own heart, you say, tells you that he will

come back. I tell you that it is God speaking to your heart. Your boy will return to you — and I shall pray every day that it may be soon."

She did not try to thank me. She sat very still for a few minutes, and when she lifted her head she was her own controlled self again. She stepped over to the bookcase in the corner and taking down an old Bible brought it to me.

"The last time our minister in Haydensburg called," she said, "he took the Bible and glanced at the first page where it opened and gave me a memory verse. There it is." I followed the direction of her gesture and saw framed on the wall this verse:

*Trust in the Lord and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land and verily thou shalt be fed.*

"It's been a wonderful comfort to me," she said, "for there were times after the store was sold when I wasn't

always sure of being fed. But it's time for me to have a new verse," she continued; "won't you open the Book and read me one from the first page you turn to?"

I opened the Bible at random, and glancing at the page as she had asked read to her:

*And at evening time it shall be light.*

"That is your verse," I said. "There's your light in the window at eventide for your boy, and some night God will flash the light of his love and reveal him to you. Remember — in the troubled times, when things look darkest — remember at evening time it shall be light."

"Thank you a thousand times, Doctor," she cried.

And so we left her comforted.

Every Sunday morning she was in her place under the gallery, though it must have taken her an hour at least to come; and one Wednesday evening

I was surprised to find her at the prayer meeting. She lingered after the others had gone; I could see that she wanted to speak to me. Indeed, she seemed hardly able to contain herself until we were alone in my study.

"Oh, Doctor," she burst out, "such a wonderful thing has happened!"

"He has come home?" I said.

"No, not yet," she responded, her enthusiasm dampened just a trifle. "He hasn't come yet, but he's coming. This month he's coming. God has promised it to me."

"Tell me about it," I said quietly.

"It was last night. I was asleep, and suddenly I saw him as plainly as I see you here. I seemed to be in darkness, until all at once a glow of light came from above and there he was in the middle of it — my Sam, my boy. He has grown older and his shoulders have broadened out but his features haven't changed a bit. He had on sailor clothes

as though he had come home from a long journey. I reached out my hands to him and cried, and just then I heard a voice, as clear as could be. 'Have faith,' it said. 'At evening time it shall be light.' Oh, Doctor, you believe it, don't you? Tell me, Doctor, that you believe it."

What could I say? I answered her with all the assurance I could command and walked with her to the street car. But all the way home I found myself wondering at the second sight that is sometimes the gift of God to mothers, and praying earnestly that in the case of the Widow Marshall the vision which her faith had brought her might prove true.

Saturday morning I received a little note written in her quaint, old-fashioned hand, apparently on the other half of the sheet of paper on which she had written us before. The vision, she said, had come to her again; she knew now

that God had heard and would answer our prayers. She was very happy. Sunday morning I saw her at a distance, but there was little time to think of her or of anybody else, for that evening I was to give the first of my series of talks on the Life of Christ, illustrated with lantern slides, and I left immediately after the morning service to prepare for it.

The church was packed that night. Stereopticon slides, and particularly colored slides, were a far greater novelty in those days than they are now. The lantern was in the gallery and the screen, which was a large one, hung clear across the choir loft behind the pulpit. I began with a map of Galilee, showed pictures of the birth in the manger and the flight into Egypt, and then some scenes in modern Nazareth, accompanying the slides with a description of the experiences and habits which must have made up the boyhood of Jesus. So

far as was possible, I told the story in the words of the Gospel narrative, and the effect must have been both vivid and impressive, for the audience sat in perfect silence.

We came at length to the baptism in the river Jordan:

"'And Jesus, when he was baptised,'" I said, following Matthew's account, "'went up straightway out of the water —'"

I glanced at the screen, expecting to see the picture of the baptism, but instead the operator had projected a scene belonging much later in the lecture. He realized his mistake instantly and withdrew the slide, while I went on with the narrative:

"'went up straightway out of the water, and lo, a voice —'"

At that instant, when the screen was blank, a man rose in front of the lantern in the gallery, so that his head intercepted the light and his silhouette was thrown

with perfect sharpness on the gleaming circle in the middle of the screen.

The shadow was there only an instant, for the man immediately dropped back into his seat and the operator flashed on the screen the baptism picture. But in that moment the congregation was startled by a piercing cry from under the gallery.

"My son, my boy! Oh, Sammy, my boy!" said the voice.

Then there was a more general cry of:

"Lights! Turn on the lights!"

I thought I recognized the voice. "Turn on a light," I said firmly. "Let everyone remain perfectly quiet."

An usher in the rear snapped on one of the electric lights and, looking in that direction, I saw the Widow Marshall rushing for the gallery door. Two or three men left their seats and followed, attempting to quiet her, but an army would not have succeeded.

"Sammy!" she called, "Your mother

is coming for you, Sammy." She seemed to have cleared the stairway in a single bound, for before I quite realized what had happened she was in the gallery. Following the light of the stereopticon down to the front row of seats, she threw her arms about the neck of the tall young man whose shadow had appeared upon the screen.

The congregation was in a furor of excitement. Men stood up; women, restless in the dark, whispered shrilly to each other. I stepped to the front of the platform, and shouted out into the darkness:

"Let no one leave his seat. The lights will be turned on in a moment. The lecture will be continued next Sunday night, but this service will be closed now with the benediction. You have seen a greater sermon than your ears will ever hear. You have seen the answer of many prayers, and the dead returned to life."

While the congregation was composing itself for the benediction I sent an usher to bring the Widow Marshall and her boy to my study, and there after a few minutes I found them both, their faces smiling through their tears.

"He has come back!" cried the Widow Marshall, pushing the big, fine-featured lad forward until he nearly fell into my arms. "Oh, Doctor, the vision is fulfilled. At evening time there *was* light."

He told her that night about his wanderings and why his letters had not reached her and how he had gone back to Haydensburg and from there had traced her to the city. All day he had tramped about through the unfamiliar city streets, and, drawn by the lights and the music, he had at length wandered into the church. It was very late before the story ended and I pressed them both to come to our house for the night rather than undertake the long

ride home. But the Widow Marshall would not have it so.

"The light is burning for Sammy in the window," she said. "I want him to come home and blow it out."

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 007 211 973 3